

St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church
Ekuik
Alaska

HABS No. AK-88

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
ST. NICHOLAS RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

HABS No. AK-88

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Location: Ekuk, Nushagak Bay, Alaska.

Present Owner: Alaska Diocese, Orthodox Church in America.

Present Occupant: St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church.

Present Use: Church.

Significance: A number of historic Russian Orthodox churches survive in Alaska, built by Native congregations in traditional forms. The modest frame structure of St. Nicholas Church is distinguished by a small belltower and a varied roof that is hipped over the sanctuary but gabled at the opposite end.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1917, according to Victor Sifsof and Harry Barnes.
2. Builder: The builder was probably John Huyano, who also executed much of the decorative work on the interior. He signed one of the picture frames.
3. Original plans and construction: The rectangular, wood-framed building has a roof that is hipped over the sanctuary and gabled over the west end of the nave. There is a narrow narthex, out of which rises a small belltower.
4. Alterations and additions: A new roof was put on in 1965, but the form was unchanged.

B. Previous Churches on the Site:

Ekuk had a population of 112 Eskimos in the early 1880s (Petroff, 17). In 1904, the church identified "Ekuk Point, left bank Nushagak River" as the site of church property, indicating that there was a church here at that time (Alaskan Russian Church Archives, reel 214).

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The main block is covered with a hipped roof on the sanctuary end and a gabled roof at the opposite end. The nave seems to be

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missing an opening, as there is no window on the west end of the north side to correspond to the one on the south side.

2. Condition of fabric: fair.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The main block of the church measures 16'-4" x 34'-4", with a 7'-0" x 7'-0" narthex on the front.
2. Foundations: Wood post.
3. Walls: The walls are covered with beveled siding, painted white with green trim.
4. Structural system: Wood frame.
5. Stoop: Small plank stoop and steps.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The front door is a double, paneled door.
 - b. Windows: The windows are mostly boarded over, but had six-over-six-light sash.
7. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: The roof is hipped on the east end, gabled on the west, covered with corrugated metal.
 - b. Cornice, eaves: There are decorative bargeboards on the west end of the narthex.
 - c. Belltower: A pyramidal-roofed belltower rises out of the roof of the narthex. The bells have been removed to a stand on the ground.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The nave is one open space, separated from the sanctuary on the east by the iconostas. The narthex is on the west.
2. Stairways: There is a one-step amvon, with a semi-circular projection in the center and krilos on the sides.
3. Flooring: Tongue-and-groove boards painted gray.

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4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls and ceilings are flush boards painted white.
5. Doorways: Between the nave and narthex there is a double, paneled door, currently off its hinges.
6. Decorative features: The seven-bay iconostas is plain, with gold-painted frames around the icons. There is a chandelier made of wood, rope, and beads, and wooden lampadas on the side walls.

D. Site:

The church sits on a hill on the shore, on one side of town. The church faces west, with the altar on the east, as is traditional among Russian Orthodox churches. There are graves on the north side of the church.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Alaskan Russian Church Archives, reel 214, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

Sifsof, Victor, and Harry Barnes, church members, interviewed by author May 27, 1990.

Petroff, Ivan. Report on the Population, Industries, and Resources of Alaska. Washington: GPO, 1884.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Documentation of St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), a division of the National Park Service, the state of Alaska, and the Icon Preservation Task Force. The project was executed under the general direction of Robert J. Kapsch, chief of HABS/HAER, and Boyd Evison, Alaska Regional Director, National Park Service. Recording was carried out during summer 1990 by Steven M. Peterson, project director; Jet Lowe, photographer; and Alison K. Hoagland, historian, who prepared this report.